SILENT ARMIES

35:07 REQUIEM FOR THE
PERMANENT MIDNIGHT

40:52 PREPARATION FOR THE
COMING WHITE DAYS /
WE ARE ASLEEP IN THE
ARMS OF MACHINES

42:32 FULL COLLAPSE ON
IMPACT

00:00 STREETS FILLED WITH
NOISE / EACH PERSON
CONTROLLING A MACHINE

00:38 IMPACT RESONANCE

01:07 INTERIOR / EXTERIOR
REVERSAL

05:03 TIMELAPSE COLLISION

We wrote Full Collapse in the months near the end of 1999 and began recording it at the top of the millennium. Our first tentative steps into touring had been taken. We had started playing like a band should, for the first time, and found a great romance and mystery on the road together, in the small hours of the morning, where the light was unimaginable and all the clocks seemed to fall asleep, leaving us to each other and our ghost stories.

We found a path among the long country roads that showed us not just the hidden interior of our country but also the dark linings of our own secret hearts. We began to catch a feeling on the wind– on the summer breeze, along with the scents of Night Blooming Jasmine, Moonflower and Japanese Wisteria– that things were closing down, lights were going out, clocks ceasing their ticking. Julian Barnes calls it The Sense of an Ending, and though we were just beginning, we were unable to escape this sense of things ending, all around us.

People were obsessed with Y2k, the idea that, at the end of the decade/century/millenium, all technology might suddenly cease functioning. It was excitement passing for fear: if the future were to be cancelled, perhaps we could travel instead to the past, for once. How much easier to deal with the shutdown of the global economy or loss of our nuclear guidance systems, rather than face the unknowable realm of virtual reality, artificial intelligence and total dislocation from our understanding of the world.

Sitting in Logan Square, I wrote, "Streets Filled with Noise//Each Person Controlling a Machine" and pictured the crowd of people walking around with their eyes down, rather than ahead. The fact that I imagined a small robot, rather than an iPhone, shows how wrong we all were about the future, even when we could predict its general outline.

At shows, people began to tell us that they had discovered us on a popular music message board. Apparently we were one of the bands getting the most downloads. I asked my old room mate, Clay, how it was possible to *download music*. He tried to explain it to me that it was no different than a CD, *digital is digital*, but that didn't make sense to me either: I had always equated digital with the 80's, thought of it as a slick future sound, like Kraftwerk or the music from Memorex ads. So instead he tried to explain binary code to me. But I still couldn't understand how everything and anything could be represented with just ones and zeroes. Why was 10100101010010101010110 a stray pixel from a photograph and 11111101010010101010111111100000000000 the splinter of a sound from a drumstick as it smashes into a crash cymbal?

He began to explain how the ones and zeroes, themselves, gave instructions for what to do with the bit string. Apparently, computers had the software to decode the series of numbers and make sense of the difference between a song, a video and a photograph. I found this enormously comforting– that it was all about the software used to decode the binary– until he pointed out that the software was itself, a set of encoded binary instructions. The idea of ones and zeroes sorting other ones and zeroes into video, into speech or vision, made me feel sick whenever I gave it too much thought, and as a result, I avoided technology. Throughout the writing and recording of Full Collapse, the record which would define our careers, I had no TV, no computer and no cell phone. I listened to dubbed cassettes on Walkmen and car stereos. I went to see films in the theater. It seemed that Pre-Millenium Tension had gotten into me, as much as anyone.

Not long before recording the album, we got home from a short tour. I still drove the van quite a bit in those days, as I was obsessed with controlling the stereo, so I was feeling pretty run down from the overnight shifts and lack of sleep. I was lying in bed, my first morning home, and I couldn't sleep. There was a bird right outside my window, chirping uncontrollably. But there was no song in his throat, no gentle melody, just a repetitive series of chirps in staccato bursts against my window, like fake laughter or a volley of gunfire. I desperately needed sleep. I took a Valium and put in earplugs but nothing could drown the little bird out. When I closed my eyes, his tiny bird voice lit up the darkness beneath my eyelids a kind of neon terror. I heard him in the fillings of my teeth. Still, I couldn't admit defeat, couldn't get a coffee and go see an early morning film(still my favorite tour decompression– best if the showing is before 11AM). I put a pillow over my head and tried to bury myself below the high tide line of consciousness.

After a time, the chirp of the bird became the only thing that was real. There was nothing but infinite emptiness and the broken glass of his voice. It sounded as if he were shouting, *HERE–HERE–HERE* across the sky. It occurred to me that he probably was. Without solid ground, birds find themselves falling through the air, at all times. I imagined myself flying, without even the piece of earth beneath my feet for comfort or reference, and began to let the feeling spin out until I was a single rock, floating through the endless black void of space; until I was a single spark at the bang of creation. As I drifted through the darkness of my own thoughts, the bird's call became my only anchor. His grating chirps sounded suddenly defiant, brave: *HERE–HERE–HERE*, Here I am fighting back all this emptiness. In a way, wasn't this the first word in all of existence? I am here. Nothing else could have been expressed, for that was the first thought. That simple 1 against all those stacked up 0s of nothingness, *HERE*. It has come to mean so many things over the evolutionary process: *HERE–HERE–HERE*, Here I am, mate, come find me by the sound of my voice, and it meant, *HERE–HERE–HERE* Here is food and plenty and life, and surely it has become a statement of its opposite: *HERE–HERE–HERE Here is danger, stay away.*

All of these different meanings stacked up on this one basic symbol: the 1, the tweet, the HERE. How could the little bird possibly keep track of all these different uses? Was it just the position of the 1 against the zero? The tweet against the silence? And how did the bird interpret these ones of sound against the zero of silence? Software. The arrangement of synapses in it's brain, all firing their sparks of meaning, organizing consciousness and recognizing symbols, recognizing the tweet of meaning. Codes, breaking other codes. The software of life.

I sat up like a bolt in bed. This bird would be the symbol for the band and the binary code would become a theme on our next record. But would people think the dove was religious, peaceful? There were already so many associations, so many meanings piled upon the dove. I smiled, seeing the beautiful symmetry of the symbol and the symbolized: meaning would always be layered, stacked unsupportably upon previous meaning.

But parsing that meaning was a social task, something to be done together, all of us sorting out what things mean, together, all of our ones gathered against the terrifying zero of the future to come.

Notes on the cover.

All titles taken from text below the tray of the CD for Full Collapse.Originally imagined as a suite of dances, these titles have times corresponding to the major musical movements of Full Collapse.

00:00 Streets Filled with Noise// Each Person Controlling a Machine (Heads bowed, shuffling to a waltz)

00:38 Impact ResonanceA quick double clap that corresponds to the snare drum entrance from Understanding in a Car Crash.

1:07 Interior// Exterior Reversal We begin to sing.

5:07 Timelapse Collision

Jumping, shaking, dancing.

7:50 Migratory Path to Massacre One hand aloft. Remembrance.

13:45 Radio Tuned to the Frequency of Human Coordinates Come together. Listen.

17:47 Full Identity Removal// The Movie Theater is on FireKneel. Scream 'til we die'... try and lose yourself in the music, totally, removing even the self.

18:53 Sexuality Pending Survival Vogue.

22:15 Paris En Flammes// Vive Paris Burn for your love.

23:27 The Risk is Part of the RhythmStuttered movements of the arms, geometric, stabbing.

26:30 Life with Regret. Flailing. Violent motions.

27:02 Rebuilding the House. Loosen shoulders. Nod head.

30:44 Footsteps of the Silent Armies March in place.

36:07 Requiem for the Permanence of Midnight. Stitch yourself to the branch.

40:52 Preparation for the Coming White Days// We are Asleep in the Arms of Machines Exit, shuffle, buy a shirt, check your messages, get in your car.

42:32 Full Collapse on Impact.

MASSACRE

13:45 RADIO TUNED TO THE FREQUENCY OF HUMAN COORDINATES

17:47 FULL IDENTITY REMOVAL / THE MOVIE THEATER IS ON FIRE

18:53 SEXUALITY PENDING SURVIVAL

22:15 PARIS EN FLAMMES/ VIVE PARIS

23:27 THE RISK IS PART OF THE RHYTHM

26:50 LIFE WITH REGRET

27:02 REBUILDING THE HOUSE

00:00 STREETS FILLED WITH NOISE / EACH PERSON CONTROLLING A MACHINE

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[illegible] MIGRATORY PATH TO MASSACRE

[illegible] FOOTSTEPS OF THE SILENT ARMIES

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